

The State of the Union Address: Milestones

1790: President George Washington delivers the first "annual message of the president."

1801: Thomas Jefferson, believing the tradition of speaking to Congress is too "royal," sends his annual message in a letter. The written tradition continues for over a century.

1823: President James Monroe sends a letter to Congress which outlines the Monroe Doctrine opposing European intervention in the Americas: *"...as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers..."*

1862: As Civil War battles raged, Abraham Lincoln sends his famous "last best hope" annual message to Congress: *"Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history...the fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free - honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth."*

1913: Woodrow Wilson revives the tradition of delivering the annual message in a speech to Congress: *"I am very glad indeed to have this opportunity to address the two Houses directly and to verify for myself the impression that the President of the United States is a person, not a mere department of the Government hailing Congress from some isolated island of jealous power, sending messages, not speaking naturally and with his own voice - that he is a human being trying to cooperate with other human beings in a common service."*

1941: With war in Europe, Franklin Roosevelt set forth his famous "four freedoms" in his January 6 State of the Union Message: *"In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression - everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way - everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want. . . everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear. . . anywhere in the world."*

1965: As the power of television becomes increasingly clear, Lyndon Johnson shifts the State of the Union address from midday to evening to attract a larger audience.

1986: On the day of his scheduled State of the Union speech, Ronald Reagan intended to use the news that a schoolteacher had been launched into space as a metaphor for the country's bright future. Instead, the speech was postponed when the space shuttle Challenger, carrying schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe and her crewmates, exploded after launch.

For the full text of speeches cited here, go to the "Famous Speeches on *About the USA*: - <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/speeches/>



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